

Chapter 2: Public Involvement and Identification of Refuge Planning Issues



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On October 1, 1997, the Service issued a Notice of Intent to prepare a number of Comprehensive Management Plans (CMP), along with associated environmental documents, in the Federal Register, Vol. 62, No. 190. This Notice of Intent included the preparation of a Comprehensive Management Plan (CMP)¹¹ for the Mark Twain National Wildlife Refuge Complex.

Following internal scoping and other preparations, the Refuge Complex hosted six open houses (August 25-27, November 17-18, and December 15, 1998) to inform the public of the planning process. These open houses were held at Wapello, Iowa, Keithsburg, Illinois, Alexandria and Annada, Missouri, Ursa and Brussels, Illinois, respectively. Refuge staff provided maps, National Wildlife Refuge System information and were available to answer questions from visitors. Interested citizens attending each open house were asked to express

their thoughts, ideas and concerns regarding refuge programs and operations. Most of the interactions were verbal conversations with staff but visitors were also encouraged to fill in comment sheets that could be turned in at the open house or mailed in later. In either case, issues raised in these sessions were recorded and are on file at Complex headquarters. News releases were issued to local communities prior to each open house. News and/or television media covered four of the events.

The following spring, Refuge staff participated in additional public involvement by joining in six of the 12 Habitat Needs Assessment public meetings held in April and May 1999 (those held within the AEC). The National Audubon Society and Upper Mississippi River Conservation Committee (UMRCC) gathered public input on current and future priorities for the River system. Staff interacted with members of the public, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and personnel from other Federal and State agencies as an integrated part of our CCP public involvement process.

Mailing lists were compiled of interested individuals, adjacent property owners, non-governmental organizations, State and Federal agencies, and political interests from each open house and public meeting. Comprehensive conservation planning updates were mailed periodically to these parties. The updates were

¹¹ The name of this process was subsequently changed to Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) by the Refuge Improvement Act (RIA) signed into law on October 9, 1997.

intended to inform those who had expressed an interest in the status of the planning process and to invite additional comment. The mailing list continues to grow and at last count was approximately 700 contacts, including the media.

Because the Complex overlays thousands of acres of COE General Plan (GP) lands within the floodplain, the COE was asked to participate in the CCP process as a cooperating agency in accordance with NEPA guidelines. Coordination efforts have been established with the Rock Island and St. Louis Districts, as well as the Mississippi Valley Division (MVD) in Vicksburg, Mississippi. A joint CCP briefing for both Districts' field operations staff was held in Quincy on March 28, 2000. The Directors of the Illinois Department of Natural Resources and the Iowa Department of Natural Resources and the Director of the Missouri Department of Conservation designated points of contact at their State Office level for providing state input on the CCP process and, in particular, to coordinate comments from their various organizational levels and programs into a single state position. Briefings for these points of contact and other staff were held in Iowa on December 9, 1999, in Missouri on December 10, 1999, and in Illinois on January 24, 2000. Additional briefings were conducted at the St. Louis and Rock Island Corps Districts and at state headquarters of the Illinois DNR, Missouri DNR and Iowa DNR in July 2001. Input and ideas reflected in this plan have been gained through interactions with State field level biologists both before and during the formal CCP process.

In June 1999, Complex staff met at the Upper Midwest Environmental Sciences Center (UMESC) with research biologists from three locations of the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) Biological Resources Division. The 2-day workshop focused on the development of habitat management objectives for the Complex. The Service developed a Memorandum of Agreement with UMESC for assistance with interpreting existing data and for utilizing the expertise at UMESC to help provide the best available scientific information for consideration in the development of the plan.

Issues

The following, in no particular order, is a summation of major issues discussed at open houses and inter-agency meetings. Refuge program goals, objectives and strategies listed later in this document address each of these issues.

- Water level management
 - Fishery resources
 - Forest management
 - Recreational opportunities
 - Wildlife disturbance by recreational visitors
 - Waterfowl habitat management
 - Environmental Management Program
 - Siltation and water quality
 - Habitat for non-game migratory birds
 - Facilities repair and upkeep
 - Contaminant-free, abundant wildlife
 - Hunting/fishing/trapping opportunities
 - Land acquisition
 - Interagency partnership and coordination
 - Balance between the competing uses and user of the River, and,
 - Restoration of backwaters, side channels, and associated wetlands.
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